The Meaning of the Cross

Rev. Henry E. Jackson

BT
265
.J324
1911

5.6.21.

LIBRARY OF THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PRINCETON, N. J.

PRESENTED BY

The Author.

BT 265 .J324 1911
Jackson, Henry Ezekiel, 1869-
The meaning of the cross

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

By

HENRY E. JACKSON

Author of "Benjamin West, His Life and Work," "The Message of the Modern Minister," "Great Pictures as Moral Teachers"

Introduction by

HUGH BLACK

Author of "The Gift of Influence," "Culture and Restraint," "Friendship," Etc.

New York Chicago Toronto

Fleming H. Revell Company

London and Edinburgh

Copyright, 1911, by
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 123 North Wabash Ave.
Toronto: 25 Richmond Street, W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

INTRODUCTION

This little book consists of a sermon preached in two parts, on successive Sunday mornings in the Christian Union Congregational Church of Montclair, New Jersey, by its minister. The men of the church came to him afterwards and asked for permission to have it printed in book form, so that it could be distributed. They also requested me to write a word by way of preface, which I take pleasure in doing.

The men said that they wanted the sermon to be published because they felt that it was a clear and helpful presentation of a subject, about which there is great need of clearness. They declared that they had found serious difficulty in associating any definite idea with the great Christian fact of the Cross, and they assumed that the same difficulty must be felt by many other intelligent laymen

throughout the Church. It is for the purpose of giving comfort and guidance to other perplexed laymen that Mr. Jackson's statement of this fundamental truth of Christianity is now published.

A minister is only performing his highest function of leadership, when he seeks to give some clear and positive statement of the great doctrines which will commend them to modern life. The greatest intellectual need of the Church is to have the Christian certainties restated to our age. This is the task of the pulpit, and every encouragement ought to be given to the minister who attempts it. After all, the test of a doctrine is that it can be preached. Left as a proposition of a creed, or as part of a doctrinal system, it may fail to make any connection with reality. It needs to be brought to the test of life.

Mr. Jackson does not pretend to have said the last word on the Christian idea of the Cross, nor to have made a new discovery. He seeks to make the great doctrine vital, with a real meaning to thoughtful men, giv-

ing a motive to Christian life, that it may influence character and affect conduct.

HUGH BLACK.

Montclair, N. J.

CONTENTS

I. The Irony of the Cross, ... 13
II. The Pagan Idea of the Cross, 18
III. The Meaning of the Cross, 35
IV. The Cross a Symbol of Love,. 45
V. The Cross as a Law of Life, 53
VI. The Success of the Cross, .. 60
VII. The Joy of the Cross, ... 71

"As in the life of the Master, so in the life of every faithful disciple, the cross must be borne, the perpetual sacrifice must be made, as the price of love's presence in a world of selfishness and hate; but the cross is transfigured into a crown of rejoicing, the sacrifice is transformed into privilege and pleasure by those precious personal relationships which are the supreme glory and gladness of the soul, and which could be maintained on no cheaper terms."

WILLIAM DEWITT HYDE.

"There is no good of life but love—but love!
What else looks good, is some shade flung from love;
Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,
Never you cheat yourself one instant! Love.
Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest!"

ROBERT BROWNING.

"Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends."—Jesus.

"Christ suffered in your behalf, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps."—The Apostle Peter.

The Meaning of the Cross

I.

The Irony of the Cross.

THE turning point of human history is the time when Jesus died of a broken heart. By a strange and beautiful irony, the means which were employed to put Him to death, constituted the chief means, by which He became the world's supreme leader and turned the course of history out of its old channels into new ones. By the use of the cross, the men who murdered Him, expected once for all to defeat Him and His cause, by associating His name with odium and shame. The cross had about it associations similar to those of the gibbet and the scaffold, only worse. It was the symbol of national degradation. Rome borrowed it from the cruel East, but she would not use it upon even her meanest citizen. It was reserved for the alien and the slave.

The effect of trying to bury the cause of Christ under the disgrace of the cross, was exactly the opposite from that which had been expected. The odium put upon Jesus did not eclipse His name, but gave it a place above every other name. After Jesus hung upon it, the cross was instantly changed from a symbol of degradation, and became the symbol of the gentleness of God; it became the symbol of the new religion; it became the mightiest factor for good in human life. No story in human history has been so fascinating as the story of the Cross of Christ.

This is indeed a most note-worthy fact, and requires some explanation in order to account for it. When Christianity came to China with the cross as its sign and symbol, it is not at all surprising that the Chinese wondered at it, mocked at it, and issued an edict against it. This edict said,—"Why should the worshippers of Jesus reverence the instrument of His punishment, and consider it so to represent Him as not to venture to tread upon it? Would it be common sense,

if the father or ancestor had been killed by a shot from a gun, or by a wound from a sword, that his sons or grandsons should reverence the gun, or the sword as their father or ancestor?'' This question is a challenge, which the Christian is very glad to accept, because the answer to it will not only reveal the real meaning of the cross, but also reveal the secret of the entire life of Jesus. No religion was ever founded on the assassination of Cæsar or the death of Socrates, but a religion has been founded on the Cross of Christ, because Jesus was who and what He was. The Cross of Christ became an object of reverence, because of the man who hung upon it, and the motive which led Him to do it.

The idea, which makes the cross to be the natural symbol of Christianity, may be clearly indicated by a contrast, which a well-known and clear-minded Christian teacher has made, between the pagan and the Christian conception of sacrifice. This contrast will exhibit the innermost meaning of the cross.—Agamemnon has taken as a prize in war, Chryseis, the daughter

of Chryses, the priest of Phœbus, and has refused to allow her father to ransom her. In consequence Phœbus has sent a pestilence into the Greek camp, and the people are perishing. To appease the angry god, Ulysses is sent to return the captured daughter to her father. Leading her to her father and bringing the fat beeves as a gift to the angry god, "the wise Ulysses" speaks thus:

"O Chryses! Agamemnon, King of men,
Sends me in haste to bring this maid to thee
And offer up this hallowed hecatomb
To Phœbus, for the Greeks; that so the god
Whose wrath afflicts us sore may be appeased."

The Apostle John, interpreting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, says:

"God so loved the world
That He gave His only begotten Son
That whosoever believeth in Him
Should not perish but have everlasting life"

These two quotations, one from Homer, the greatest of the Greek poets, the

other from John, the beloved of the Twelve Apostles, interpret two contrasted conceptions of sacrifice. In these conceptions there is a three-fold difference.

In the pagan conception God is wrathful; in the Christian conception God is Love.

In the pagan conception man is wise, usually wiser than the god whose stern mood he softens; in the Christian conception man is destroying himself by his ignorance and his sin.

In the pagan conception the sacrifice is offered by man to appease the wrath of the god; the peril comes from the god, the salvation from "wise Ulysses"; in the Christian conception the sacrifice is made by God's love, exhibited in Jesus' sacrifice of Himself to give life to man; the peril comes to man from himself, the salvation from God.

II.

The Pagan Idea of the Cross.

IT is essential that this contrast be kept clearly in mind. The Bible is the only book, and Christianity is the only religion which represents God as seeking for man and man's welfare. Every other religion represents man as seeking after God and trying to win His favor. The Greek pagan idea, that the death of Jesus was necessary to appease God's wrath, or satisfy his law, is the very idea that Jesus sought to destroy by substituting for it the self-sacrifice of love. And yet pagan ideas of sacrifice have persisted for centuries. They have not infrequently been imported into the Christian conception, doing great damage to the cause of Christianity and the cause of spiritual religion. But the cross has survived all the pagan interpretations which have been put upon it and all crude thought—forms in which they have been expressed. This fact alone is suffi-

cient proof of the divine principle for which the cross stands.

Jesus came as He said, "to seek and to save that which was lost." The mission of Jesus was the making of men, making men to be like unto Himself. He did this service for John and Matthew and the Magdalene and a multitude more, before He died and without any reference to His death. Of course, His death was a wonderful *advantage* to His work of winning men, as we shall see, but it need not have been *necessary* to it. It was discovered to be necessary to His work, because men were as they were. But it was the sin of men that made His death necessary, not the love of God. The meaning and value of Jesus' sacrifice can never be appreciated unless we make a conscious effort to keep out of it all pagan ideas.

Jesus did not die on the cross in order to appease God's wrath. It was God's love which sent His Son. It was not necessary to do anything to induce God to be kind. He was always kind, and Jesus' death itself is the demonstration of this fact. The

cross is the correction of the old and pathetic mistake of thinking that men need to dread their heavenly Father. Jesus made it clear that a father does not need the intervening death of any one to induce him to love his prodigal.

Jesus' death was not designed as an offering to remove a plague from the camp, as the Greek sacrifice was. He did not die to remove the penalty that necessarily follows all sin. To remove from a man the penalty of his wrong doing, does not necessarily make him a better man. It very frequently makes him a worse man. To remove it, therefore, would be an unkindness to him.

Jesus did not die as a punishment for human sin. Jesus was not punished on account of anybody's sin, for the simple and obvious reason that it is both immoral and impossible for any man to be punished for another's sin. There never can be any punishment where there is no guilt. Jesus felt no guilt, and therefore could not be punished. He *suffered* on account of sin, as many another man has done, but he was *not punished* for it.

It is nowhere said in the New Testament that Christ died in the stead of man, but always on behalf of man. The word used is never "anti", which means "instead of." The word used is always "huper", which means "on behalf of". If I volunteer to serve a prison sentence in the stead of a man who is condemned to it and who deserves it, I may suffer for him, but I am not punished for him, because I have no sense of guilt such as he has. My imprisonment is not a punishment, it is something else. It is heroism, martyrdom, the joy of a noble self-sacrifice. It is very evident that the pagan ideas of sacrifice must be eliminated from the winsome story of the cross, before its historical and spiritual significance ever can be discovered. We must eliminate from our thinking any idea of human sacrifice, such as led Jephthah to slay his daughter, and Agamemnon to devote Iphigenia to the knife, before the cross can tell its true story to us. The Old Testament prophets clearly saw this need when they said that the kind of sacrifice that is pleasing to God is a broken heart or a contrite spirit.

If, then, Jesus' death could not have been necessary to appease God's wrath, as the pagan sacrifices were thought to be, why has His death occupied so large a place in Christian thought? Why is His cross the symbol of Christianity? All Christians agree with R. E. Welsh when he says: "The Magna Charta which contains most of Christ, and in which He rises to altitudes beyond the dreams of others, is embodied in those words before which every man, whatever his creed, must bare the head:—

'God so loved the world
That He gave His only begotten Son
That whosoever believeth in Him
Should not perish but have everlasting life.'"

This Magna Charta contains not the slightest suggestion of the pagan idea of sacrifice. It does not say that God gave His Son *to die*. He just *gave* His Son. It does not say that a man acquires everlasting life by believing in Jesus' death, but by believing in *Him*. And yet the fact is that Jesus' death on the cross does occupy a command-

ing place in the records of His life and in Christian thought. Why is this so?

The Chinese edict against the cross which I have just quoted, is a challenge to all thoughtful Christians. Some Christian men have the same question-mark in their own minds. A sincere, scholarly Christian man writing me recently, expressed it in these words: "When a soldier dies for his country, is the enemy's gun that shot him a necessary symbol of his patriotism? I think not. He would have been the same patriot had he not been shot." While it is true that Jesus was not engaged in an open conflict of arms, as a soldier is, with men on both sides using the same kind of weapons under the rules of honorable warfare, but died by himself alone, as a criminal unjustly condemned by the Supreme Court of his own country, yet the main point of the parallel between the enemy's gun and the cross of Christ is well taken. The cross was the natural symbol of death, why should it be regarded as the symbol of love? The fact that the instrument used by Jesus' enemies to kill Him

has become the sign of His devotion and symbol of His religion is a fact of history in a class by itself. It is altogether unparalleled and unprecedented. It evidently requires explanation.

Aside from all philosophical theories of the cross which have been proposed and then in turn abandoned, because found unworthy, there must be some fundamental reason to account for this unusual occurrance. Behind any and all theories or no theory at all, it is a true instinct which has led men of all clases to pay unusual reverence to Jesus in the article of His death. Why is this so?

There are two reasons, very closely connected which seem to me to account for it. The first reason is that Jesus' behavior during His crucifixion reached the highest point of moral achievement, a point never before reached. To pray for one's murderers is an act of moral grandeur of which human nature was thought to be incapable. Other men before Jesus had been treated unjustly and had so borne it as justly to deserve the titles of hero

and martyr. Socrates did. But Jesus reached such heights of moral elevation that the terms, hero and martyr, are not large enough to describe Him. He cannot be classed with any other man. His death likewise cannot be classed with the death of any other man.

The second reason is a conclusion from the first. Jesus' behavior during his crucifixion led men to conclude that He was the Son of God in a particular sense. These two reasons are closely interrelated. The way Jesus acted showed Him to be the Son of God, and because He was the Son of God, He acted as He did. Jesus' behavior,—the works He did and the way He acted,—is the reason Jesus Himself always gave why He should be regarded as the Messiah. It is true that He furnished this evidence during His life as well as in His death, just as a soldier is a patriot whether he is killed in battle or not, but the spirit of Jesus' entire life flowered out in His crucifixion and was exhibited in such beauty and power as to compel special attention. Therefore, His

death and the cross which symbolizes it, have properly occupied a central place in men's affection. Jesus' behavior on the cross, therefore, has become the norm and standard of the victory of love over hate, of good over evil, of joy over pain, of right over wrong. Therefore the cross has become a generic term in Christian thought, and any cross or sacrifice gladly borne is correctly regarded as the supreme expression of the Christian spirit.

If a man would not miss the rich meaning of the cross, he must carefully guard himself against a very common danger. When a man sees, as multitudes of men today are clearly and correctly seeing, that he must eliminate the pagan conception of sacrifice from his thinking if it is to remain Christian, he sometimes is tempted to think that the only way to discard the outgrown pagan idea of the cross, is to discard the cross itself. This, surely, is not the way of wisdom. It is, as the Germans say, to throw out the baby with the bath. The true corrective for the abuse of an idea is not

its disuse altogether, but its right use. The way of wisdom is to discard the false and cherish the true.

The men for whom the cross has been injured by unworthy theories, and who therefore, put their emphasis on Jesus' life, and attach little importance to His death, ought never to forget that the life of Jesus *includes* His crucifixion. The New Testament record of Jesus is not a systematic statement of truth, but a series of episodes in real life, and of all the episodes recorded, His death is the most significant and commanding. It has a profound meaning for men entirely apart from any unworthy theories attached to it in the past.

It is not possible to judge Jesus' life fairly, or any other man's, unless we see clearly that it is the rare outstanding experiences of a man's life which are the most significant. There is a common tendency today to reduce all human experiences to the same dead level uniformity, in order to classify them under some general law, and to discount the worth of all those experiences which cannot be so classi-

fied. But every true student of human life knows that this is not fair to all the facts. He knows that his best data for any true judgment is furnished not by the ordinary, but by the extraordinary experiences. It is the moral crises, the critical hours of emergency, the rare mountain experiences of the soul, that best reveal a man's character. They give us an instantaneous photograph of him in action.

Robert Browning, perhaps more than any other great teacher, dwells with reiterated emphasis on the indispensable importance of this fact. His poems are crowded with such statements of it as the one found in his little poem, "Cristina":—

"Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows!
  But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure though seldom, are denied us,
  When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
  And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
  To its triumph or undoing."

If we really want to know the true endowments of any man's spirit, we must observe him in his rare moments. The experience of the Cross is the critical hour of Jesus' life. If, therefore, we apply the same fair principle in judging Him, that we apply to any other man, it becomes obvious that the crucifixion, instead of being put into the background because it has been crudely and falsely interpreted, must, in all fairness, be kept in the foreground, because it exhibits His character as does no other episode of His life. The hour to judge Jesus by is the hour of His crucifixion.

Indeed, the story of the cross is our most precious possession. It enlarged human experience upward as nothing else ever did. It portrayed the highest achievement of history. It is not a theory in philosophy but a fact of history. And it is hard to think that the time can ever come when the cross will occupy a less exalted position in men's thought and affection than it now does, because it is hard to imagine how there ever could be any higher manifestation of self-sacrificing love.

"We must needs love the highest when we see it," said Tennyson. When, therefore, a man discards an unworthy theory of the cross, he ought carefully to cherish the fact for which the cross stands.

To make apparent the wisdom and possibility of doing so, I shall illustrate its accomplishment from the experience of a wise and good man. It is a well-known fact that the poet Whittier had eliminated entirely the pagan idea of sacrifice from his thought of Christianity, but he had the wisdom to perceive and cherish the rich meaning of the cross and to it he gave the warm devotion of his heart. His devotion finds frequent expression in his poems. For example in his poem "The Crucifixion":—

"That sacrifice!—the death of Him,—
The Christ of God, the holy One!
Well may the conscious Heaven grow dim,
And blacken the beholding Sun.

Oh, shall the heart—whose sinfulness
Gave keenness to His sore distress,
And added to His tears of blood—
Refuse its trembling gratitude?"

Again in his poem, "Palestine"—

"And what if my feet may not tread where
he stood,
Nor my ears hear the dashing of Gali-
lee's flood,
Nor my eyes see the cross which He bow-
ed Him to bear,
Nor my knees press Gethsemane's gar-
den of prayer.

Yet, Loved of the Father, Thy Spirit is
near
To the meek, and the lowly, and penitent
here;
And the voice of Thy love is the same
even now
As at Bethany's tomb or on Olivet's
brow.

Oh, the outward hath gone! but in glory
and power,
The spirit surviveth the things of an
hour;
Unchanged, undecaying, its Pentecost
flame
On the heart's secret altar is burning the
same!"

This experience of Whittier ought to be the normal experience of all other men, because it is only when the

cross has been freed from unworthy theories that its true and rich meaning can be appreciated. The reason why more men do not appreciate the rich meaning of the cross as Whittier did, is because their thought of it is handicapped by unworthy pagan ideas, for which they feel they must apologize. Whenever any theory of a Christian fact has to be apologized for, it adds nothing but weakness to the fact, and the theory ought to be abandoned. It is only after such unworthy theories of the cross have been discarded that its rich meaning becomes a reality to intelligent men and receives from them the warmest and deepest devotion.

This is of such importance that I emphasize it by an illustration.—Henry Ward Beecher was educated in the school of strict New England Calvinistic theology, in which Christ's death was regarded as the satisfaction to injured moral law. It was only after he had freed himself from theories which he felt were dishonoring to God and harmful to men, and which have very little relation to the moral experience of men and are therefore

essentially unpreachable,—that the real meaning of the cross came to him like a new revelation and inspired his life work with a living enthusiasm. His own description of this experience is so strong and vivid and of so much value for other men that I quote it in full:—

"I know not what the tablets of eternity have written down, but I think that when I stand in Zion and before God, the brightest thing which I shall look back upon will be that blessed morning of May when it pleased God to reveal to my wandering soul the idea that it was His nature to love a man in his sins for the sake of helping him out of them; that He did not do it out of compliment to Christ, or to a law or a plan of salvation, but from the fullness of His great heart; that He was a being not made mad by sin, but sorry; that He was not furious with wrath toward the sinner, but pitied him,—in short, that he felt toward me as my mother felt toward me, to whose eyes my wrong-doing brought tears, who never pressed me so close to her as when I had done

wrong, and who would fain, with her yearning love, lift me out of trouble. And when I found that Jesus Christ had such a disposition, and that when His disciples did wrong He drew them closer to Him than He did before—and when pride and jealousy and rivalry, and all vulgar and worldly feelings rankled in their bosoms, He opened His heart to them as a medicine to heal these infirmities; when I found that it was Christ's nature to lift men out of weakness to strength, out of impurity to goodness, out of everything low and debasing to superiority, I felt that I had found a God. I shall never forget the feelings with which I walked forth that May morning. The golden pavements will never feel to my feet as then the grass felt to them; and the singing of the birds in the woods—for I roamed in the woods—was cacophonous to the sweet music of my thoughts; and there were no forms in the universe which seemed to me graceful enough to represent the Being, a conception of whose character had just dawned upon my mind. I felt, when I had,

with the Psalmist, called upon the heavens, the earth, the mountains, the streams, the floods, the birds, the beasts, and universal being to praise God, that I had called upon nothing that could praise Him enough for the revelation of such a nature as that seen in the Lord Jesus Christ."

III.

The Meaning of the Cross.

THE one illuminating fact to be kept in mind is that by the voluntary sacrifice of Himself on the cross, Jesus revealed the eternal heart of God, and made it clear that God loves man in his sins for the sake of helping him out of them; that sin does not make Him angry, but sorry; that He loves man just as the man's mother loves him, who through her yearning love would lift her child out of sin and sorrow, if she could. The cross of Christ is God's heartache over human sin.

As we seek to discover the meaning of the cross of Christ, there is one

consideration which it will be most helpful to keep constantly in mind. We can safely assume that the meaning of Christ's death must necessarily be such that it can be easily understood by the average man, otherwise it would have no power over him. This is what Paul meant when he said, "Christ sent me to preach the gospel, not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void," that is, if he had presented it in philosophical terms its meaning would have been obscured and therefore robbed of power. All that is necessary for the average man now to understand he can understand. It is true that he may know only in part, but he knows.

By this suggestion I do not for a moment mean to intimate that there are no mysteries and unexplored elements in the manifestation of God which Jesus made. Indeed the most mystery belongs to the simple facts of life, like love, for example. I am quite aware that, in the self-conscious, scientific time in which we are living, there is a marked tendency to analyze and

scrutinize all facts, and reject those which cannot be reduced to exact intellectual formulas. We no longer repeat the verse which expressed the wonder and mystery of life to us as children:

> "Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
> How I wonder what you are
> Up above the world so high
> Like a diamond in the sky."

Our knowledge of chemistry and astronomy has caused us to revise the verse to read thus:

> "Twinkle, twinkle, little star
> I do *not* wonder what you are.
> What you are I know quite well,
> And your component parts can tell."

I deeply deplore this tendency, because I think it is unfair to the facts of life and therefore destroys our freshness of feeling and strength of enthusiasm. Our one safety from this danger is to remember that a fact is one thing, and our explanation of the fact is quite a different thing. To keep these two ideas distinct in our thought, as the great poets always do, is the first necessity, if we are to un-

derstand Christianity. To avoid confusion, we must never once forget that reality always resides in the facts, not in any theories about them, and we may change theory after theory without alarm, if the experienced facts remain. Speculations about the cross have seriously crippled Christ's influence and obscured the good news He came to tell to men who were hungry for news. It is the fact itself for which Christ's cross stands that it is important to see clearly. The fact, of course, will forever disclose new meanings and hidden beauties as one's experience of it expands. But to know the fact apart from all explanations of it, is the first essential step. Jesus endeavored to make the fact so clear that no normal man could miss it.

To the men who have been strong enough not to permit the simple and beautiful New Testament records to be covered up by layers of the dreary speculations and the bitter controversies of centuries; to the men, who are sane enough not to desert the solid moral realities of experience for the fictions and theories of an irreverent

imagination; to all such men the service which Jesus came to render them by His life and death is simple and clear enough. It could not be otherwise, for it is obvious that the facts on which man's highest hope and welfare depend must be such that the average man can understand them sufficiently to use them.

The one central fact of importance which was revealed by the life of Jesus, and especially by His death, is the love of God. Jesus did not come into the world to be crucified. He came into the world to save men from sin. He attempted to save men from sin by loving them. He was destined to suffer, because love cannot save from sin except by suffering on its behalf. By loving the world and seeking its good He incurred its hate. The cause of Jesus' death, therefore, was the existence of sin in the world. His death was made necessary not by the love of God, but by the sin of man. Sin will always hate goodness and seek its destruction. If there had been no avarice or pride or lust in the world Jesus' life would have been a

joyous one from beginning to end. He would have come to His own, and His own would have received Him as their natural master and allowed Him to help them create on earth an ideal commonwealth, the commonwealth of heaven. It was because He dared to attack avarice and pride and lust, enthroned in high places that He brought down upon Himself the wrath of evil doers. They gave Him a cross when they owed Him a throne.

The method of His death was accidental and incidental. They might have drowned Him or hanged Him or beheaded Him, and the result would have been just the same for the world. They chose to use the cross and the cross became the glorified symbol of His religion, because it was the token of His love. But He did not come to be crucified, He came to save men from sin through love. He saved men before His death as well as after. If John had died before Jesus he would have been saved from sin just the same. Can any one imagine that he would not have been saved? The point I am seeking to make clear is,

that the physical sufferings of Jesus on the cross do not save any one.

If Jesus' death, then, some one may ask, was not a sacrifice which God required Him to make for the sin of all men, but was simply the result of the hatred of His contemporaries, what relation does His death have to my salvation now? If certain men put Jesus to death centuries ago, what have I to do with that? This is a very natural question from a man who thinks that somehow his salvation depends on Jesus' physical suffering. No one has ever undertaken to say just how the physical death on the cross can save anyone. The statement conveys no tangible idea to one's mind. It is only a feeling which some have. The feeling is created by the pagan conception of sacrifice. Hence the question so frequently asked—"Does not my salvation depend in some way on the death of Jesus?" The question is answered by one illuminating fact, a fact so simple as to be easily overlooked.

The fact is that the physical suffering does not save anyone and never

did—it is the love which saves. Jesus died only once at one point of time in history, but His love lives forever because He lives forever; and because His love is the same today that it ever was, therefore it can save me today just the same as it saved the men of Jesus' day. The physical sufferings of a few hours centuries ago cannot produce salvation in the hearts of millions of men today, but the love of an ever-living Christ can and does. Just how Jesus' love saves me now through the touch of His personality upon mine is another story, which would require a separate treatment. The question before us is the place which His cross occupies. Jesus was willing to endure the cross for the sake of an idea. The cross itself therefore, is of secondary importance; the idea for which it stands is of primary importance. "The cross," says Amiel, is the guarantee of the Gospel. Therefore it has been its standard." The cross itself is not the Gospel. It is only its guarantee. Aside from Jesus' motive, His death on the cross has no more meaning or value for men than has the

death of Socrates. We are not saved by His physical sufferings, we are saved by His love. We are saved by grace.

It seems like too obvious a statement to make that the reason why the death of Jesus came to occupy so prominent a place in Christianity was simply because Jesus was put to death. Nothing could have been a greater benefit to Jesus' cause than His death. If His enemies had deliberately chosen to render Him the highest service, they could not have selected a better means of doing it. His death demonstrated that His self-sacrificing love was able to go to the limit and stand the supreme test. It demonstrated His sincerity to the utmost. It glorified for all time the one central idea to which he had devoted His whole life.

Jesus' whole life was a crucifixion. The cross has become the pathetic and outstanding symbol of His love, but, after all, the scourge and the crown of thorns and the cross are feeble symbols of the suffering He endured in His spirit. It was of a broken heart

that He died at the last, because His spirit suffered more than His body. The thing of importance to remember about the cross is the love of Him who hung upon it. The real point of the story of the cross is that it is the story of love without a limit. The story supplies the one thing that the world wanted most to hear, that it needed most to hear and that constitutes the essence of Christianity. If its central fact is not clearly seen it is hardly worth while to study any of its secondary facts. Unless the citadel is safe, it is useless to defend the outposts. If we cannot believe that love is the power that rules the world, life is robbed of all confidence and hope. To understand the Christian idea of love is far from being a light and easy matter. It is the task of a life time. To accept the fact is the first step in the process. It is this fact that Jesus made obvious. He revealed God as Father. To know God as the kind of Father that Jesus revealed Him to be is all that any man needs for his salvation. "God, Thou art love, I build my faith on that."

IV.

The Cross as a Symbol of Love.

BY an eternal law of life, love for sinful man involves suffering on their behalf. William DeWitt Hyde points out that there are three degrees of the manifestations of grace and that in them all Jesus, both in precept and practice, stands pre-eminent. All service freely rendered to others without hope of reward is a manifestation of grace. He who feeds the hungry, gives a cup of water to the thirsty, visits the prisoner, heals the sick, teaches the ignorant, entertains the stranger, nurses the wounded, comforts the mourner, reproves the erring, or does the least act of kindness to the little child, becomes thereby and to that extent an incarnation of the grace of God. The fact that Jesus centered His own life in this principle, and taught the world to find in it the source and centre of its life, is His first claim to be accepted as the Messiah, and welcomed as an authentic revelation and incarnation of the essential life of God.

The next higher form of grace is kindness and forgiveness to those who have wronged us. For then grace bears a double burden; the service freely given to another, and the evil that other one has done to us. Here again Jesus stands out supreme in history as the one who made practically effective in a considerable body of men the precept, "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you," and in the hour of His own supreme agony was able to intercede in behalf of His executioners,—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The profoundest manifestation of grace, however, is not in gratuitous service to others, nor yet in forgiveness of wrong done directly to ourselves; but in that vicarious sacrifice which makes the sins of others our own personal sorrow, and wrong done to others our own personal grievance. Compassion is the great word of the New Testament. Compassion means suffering with another. The word that best describes the life and mission of Jesus is sympathy. We have

sometimes injured this word by making it mean no more than pity, as when we say, "sympathy *for* another". If we knew its meaning we would always say "sympathy *with* another," for sympathy means suffering. It means so to identify oneself with another as to feel as he feels and bear his burdens as our own. John Woolman, the Quaker-saint, once made this entry in his journal, "I felt the depth and extent of the misery of my fellow-creatures separated from the divine harmony, and it was greater than I could bear, and I was crushed down under it." Jesus revealed such compassion, sympathy, self-sacrifice as an eternal fact in the character of God, and as the divinest element in human life, whenever and wherever it has been practiced.

The classic statement of the manifestation of this kind of love is the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. If a man knows this statement of self-sacrificing love, he knows all he needs to know of the principle for which the cross of Christ stands. All else is mere speculation. It is a perfect de-

scription of the motive of Jesus' life and death. It is the picture of an ideal servant of God. It is not stated as a revelation which God made to men, but as a discovery that men made through their experience. At first they misunderstood the suffering servant. They thought his suffering was a punishment for his own wrong doing, for it was a common idea of the Hebrew mind that all suffering is evidence of wrong doing. It was this idea that the wonderful drama of Job was written to destroy.

When they had a little deeper experience of life, they discovered that the suffering of this ideal sufferer was the self-sacrifice of His love for them.

"Surely it was our sicknesses that he bore,
And it was our pains he took as his burden,
He was pierced for iniquities that were ours
He was crushed for crimes that were ours."

Isaiah's poem is the picture of the kind of manifestation of God that men have always wanted. It is the expression of their conviction that the high-

est manifestation of God is a perfectly good man, and that the chief element in perfect goodness is self-sacrificing love. It is this self-sacrifice of love for which the cross of Christ stands, and it ought to be easy for any man to discover. It is a truth of experience. Very naturally so, for if self-sacrificing love cannot be stated in terms of human experience, the death of Jesus could have little meaning for men. This is what the incarnation means. Jesus embodied the principle stated in Isaiah's poem, that we might see it and know it and feel it. Then it became strong to win our hearts away from selfishness. When an idea is embodied in a living man, it becomes potent.

The meaning of the cross of Christ finds abundant illustration in human experience. Winston Churchill in his "Coniston" narrates such an experience. Jethro Bass is a political boss, masterful and unscrupulous. With all the strength of his nature he loves Cynthia, his adopted daughter. She has inherited Jethro's youthful affection for her mother. The purity of

her own character has increased it. She, in turn, loves and reveres him. She learns the story of the debasing methods by which he has climbed to power. Instantly she returns to her village home to seek him, hoping to obtain from him a denial of the story which she has read. The interview between them is thus described:—

"'Won't you speak to me?' she whispered. 'Won't you tell me that they are not true?' His shoulders shook convulsively. O for the right to turn to her and tell her that they are lies! He would have bartered his soul for it. What was all the power in the world compared to this priceless treasure he had lost? Once before he had cast it away, though without meaning to. Then he did not know the eternal value of love—of such love as those two women had given him. Now he knew that it was beyond value, the one precious gift of life, and the knowledge had come too late. * * * That was a Judgment Day for Jethro; and though he knew it not, he spoke through Cynthia to his Maker, confessing his faults freely and humbly

and dwelling on the justness of his punishment, not putting forward any good he may have done, nor thinking of it, nor seeking excuse because of the light that was in him. Had he been at death's door in the face of nameless tortures, no man could have dragged such a confession from him. But a great love had been given him, and to that love he must speak the truth, even at the cost of losing it."

Cynthia bore the shame and burden of his wrong doing upon her own heart, until it well-nigh broke. His remorse was made the more acute, when he discovered in her reply that his sin, great as it was, could not destroy her love. She said, "Uncle Jethro, I love you better than I have ever loved you in my life." Her self-sacrificing love for him was at once his judgment, his punishment and also his salvation. Likewise Christ suffered in our behalf. The cross means that love cannot serve without suffering, and love accepts suffering willingly and counts it a joy. The one thing that keeps earth from becoming heaven is sin. There can be no salvation

from sin without patient love, and no true love without suffering. The one way to get rid of sin is by bearing its burden through the free sacrifice of love. It was this that Jesus came to do.

By thus exhibiting what self-sacrificing love is, Jesus made love to be a new thing for men. So new indeed, that either a new word had to be found to express it, or the old one had to be re-made. No word for love in the new sense existed. The old words for love had only a domestic or sentimental significance. They were symbols chiefly for a physical sensation. Jesus made it stand for a new kind of passion in human experience. It was because no word existed to express the new idea, and in order to purge the old one of its ignoble reputation, that Paul writing his matchless poem on love, found it necessary elaborately to describe the idea itself, stating carefully what it is and what it is not. His poem says,—

"Love bears long with offenders and is helpful; love is not envious; love does not show itself off; does not

bear itself proudly; does not behave unbecomingly; seeketh not her own things; is not irritable; does not store up in memory injuries received; rejoices not in injustice, but rejoices with the truth; silently endures all experiences, trusts in them all, hopes in them all, is patient under them all."

V.

The Cross as a Law of Life.

LOVE is the master word of Christianity and the cross is its chief symbol and its true interpreter. God is love. Love is essentially self-giving. Its supreme symbol is the cross, because its supreme historic type is the Sacrifice on Calvary. "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us," said John. The world still uses the term love to express the isolating passion of one sex for the other. Jesus made all love to be one divine thing. He made it stand not only for the love of one sex for the other, but for the love of home, of friends, of ideas, of truth, of country,

of mankind, of God. He made it to be a great moral principle. He made it impossible for a selfish love to exist, for he made it to be a contradiction in terms. If it is selfish, it is not love; if it is love it is not selfish. He made it to be not only a feeling, but a principle under the control of the will. He made it to be the law of gravitation in the moral world. He made love and God to be synonymous terms. He offered it as the one remedy for all the personal and social problems of human life. He made love the one prize of life worth pursuing. Bacon quoted with approval the saying that 'It is impossible to love and to be wise.' Browning answered that it is impossible to love and *not* be wise. Browning in this remark stated the cardinal doctrine of Jesus' life. Any man who learns how to love has "caught God's secret."

The story of the cross of Christ is the supremely fascinating love-story of human history. Whether the idea for which it stands is accepted as true or not, the story of the cross from its beginning in the aspirations of men to

its realization as a fact, is the most beautiful and significant story either in history or literature. The reason why the story is not better understood is because the principle of love is not better understood. The price for understanding the story is a big price, and many are not willing to pay it. There is only one way by which the story can be understood, and that is *by living it.*

The reason why Paul so well understood the essential meaning of the cross, was because he practiced it. When he said, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved," he was describing his Master's life as well as his own. When he said of himself, "I have been crucified with Christ," he meant that he was living the same life of self-sacrificing love. When he said that in his preaching he "was determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," he meant that he had discovered that the one thing of importance for human life is self-sacrificing love.

The story of the cross was not intended to be a fascinating story. It was intended to be a law of life for all. It is the law not of self-assertion, but of self-suppression. It is commonly supposed that if a Christian practices the Golden Rule he has reached his high ideal; but the Golden Rule is far from being the Christian's ideal. It is no more than a rule of justice. Jesus states it as the standard of justice which Judaism had set up for itself. But the new standard which Jesus set up is the command—"That ye love one another *as* I have loved you." The rule of life which Jesus gave his followers is not equality of service such as the Golden Rule states, but self-sacrificing service such as the cross exhibits. We are asked to follow Christ by taking up our own crosses. "Christ suffered in your behalf, leaving you an example that ye should follow His steps." It is only by following His steps that one can understand the meaning of Christ's cross. It is my firm conviction that no one can understand the cross of Christ unless he himself has had a real ex-

perience of self-sacrifice. This is why the poor have less difficulty with it, than the literary and the well-to-do, for the poor practice self-sacrifice. It is for this reason that the essential meaning of Christianity has always been understood more easily by women than by men. Those elements most characteristic of woman's life,—her love of service, her readiness to suffer, her practice of self-sacrifice—are also the elements most characteristic of Christianity. Women readily understand the meaning of the cross because they practice it. Self-sacrificing love is no mystery to motherhood.

Artistic appreciation of the cross is not at all uncommon. The pathos of Christ's life has furnished ideal material for the artist's work, and it has been presented in drama and music and painting. But artistic appreciation is very different from real knowledge. The cross is an offense to the artistic temperament, as Paul found, when he presented it to the Greeks. For self-culture and self-satisfaction are the master ideas to the artistic

temperament. Artistic appreciation of the cross is easy enough. Intellectual appreciation also is easy enough, for then one only needs to give it a place in his system of thought. But it is only a real experience of self-sacrifice that can give one a real knowledge of the meaning of the cross.

If one would know the meaning of the cross of Christ, let him try himself to be a saviour. Let him try to save a loved one from a killing sin. When he stands by and shares the shame and burden of the loved one's sin; when he sees the sin eating out the moral fiber of the loved one's character, and watches the process of moral disintegration which he knows must end in ultimate wreckage, when his efforts in the loved one's behalf are misunderstood and he is ignored, rejected and insulted by the very one he seeks to save, then he will understand something of the sufferings of Jesus, the best lover of all human souls.

Isaiah's poem on self-sacrifice not only describes the principle, on which Jesus lived His life, and the only principle He could live it on and be a

saviour, but it also describes a principle on which every man is expected to live his life, and the only principle on which he can live his life if he would be a true friend of Jesus. "To you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer in His behalf."

John Ruskin very properly makes willingness to practice self-sacrifice the central idea of the Christian religion and the measure of its success. He says: "You cannot save men from death but by facing it for them, nor from sin but by resisting it for them. That is the final doctrine, the inevitable one, not of Christianity only, but of all heroic faith; and the first trial question of a true soul to itself must always be—"Have I a religion, have I a country, have I a love that I am ready to die for?"

It is impossible to see how man can be saved from selfishness in any other way, for self-sacrifice is an organic law of life. No patriot can save his country from sin except by suffering in his country's behalf. No teacher can save his pupil from ignorance and

sin except by suffering on his behalf. No mother can save her child from moral disaster except by suffering on his behalf.

VI.

The Success of the Cross.

JESUS for this reason, therefore, issued His edict of universal love, and called for volunteers to make self-sacrificing love their law of life, because it is the one divine power which can break down selfishness and save men from themselves. It is the method by which He Himself won the world. He reasoned thus with Himself: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself; that is, if I allow the world to murder me, I will win it; I will win the world by yielding to it." The men who murdered Him no doubt felt a thrill of the joy of victory when He died of a broken heart on the cross. They did not foresee that the shadow of that cross would fall like a blight upon themselves and darken their nation's history.

There is no doubt that Aaron Burr may have felt a thrill of the joy of victory at the fall of his great rival at Weehawken, in the gray dawn of a sultry summer day in July, 1804. "He did not foresee that his fatal bullet would add a luster for all time to the name of his fallen victim, and would cover his own with indelible dishonor. He did not foresee that the ghost of Hamilton would pursue him like a Nemesis from land to land, would mark his every project with failure, would hound his footsteps for thirty years, until at last, aged and tottering, he would sink into the grave, the victim and not the conqueror of the fatal duel at Weehawken."

The attitude of the Jewish nation to Jesus fixed its own place in history and helped to fix Jesus' place too. By allowing the world to win an apparent and temporary victory, by choosing the near defeat and the far success, Jesus won the world to His cause much sooner than He otherwise would have done. The method of Jesus was winning by yielding. It is the Japanese method in wrestling, "Jiu Jitsu".

It is the successful method in other contests beside wrestling. It is particularly true in the contest with sin. The history of other methods that have been used makes the truth of this statement abundantly apparent. In the first three chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans he shows clearly that the method of reforming human life through the agency of law and punishment has been tried twice on a grand scale in human history. It was tried in the Hebrew Republic and it was tried in the Roman Empire. And no nation was better equipped to try it than Rome. But in both cases the method ended in complete failure. Law and penalty are not of themselves reformatory. A reformation is not affected in society by the penitentiary, or in the family by the rod, or in the individual by penance. The most that punishment can do is to compel a pause until higher influences are brought to bear.

It is the testimony of history that the sight of punishment is far weaker than the power of love to refine and reform human life. The appeal to

fear is an appeal to the weakest of all motives. Robert Duffield, a reformer of large experience, gave it as his testimony that "from fear of hell we never expected virtue or high motives or a noble life, but we practically found it useless as a deterrent. It always influenced the wrong people in the wrong way. It caused infidelity to some, temptation to others and misery without virtue to most. It appealed to the lowest motives and the lowest characters, not however, to deter from vice, but to make them willing subjects of sad and often puerile superstitions."

Jesus' method of reforming character was not to conform it from without to some external law, but by the forgiveness of love to transform it from within. Jesus' method of forgiveness is the successful remedy for sin. Punishment may be necessary and often does a needed service, but the history of the world makes it clear that punisment has never been a cure for sin. It is a convincing fact that the ages in history which have been marked by the greatest severity in

their penal codes, have always been the ages when crime was most abundant. For generations the Hebrews stoned the adulteress according to the law, but they could not stone adultery out of the human heart. On the contrary, Jesus treated the woman who was a sinner with forgiving love and she was created into a new woman and went home to sin no more.

The forgiving love of God, displayed in Jesus is the most successful practical agent ever tried for the reformation and salvation of men. This fact was well understood by Rossetti who painted a picture of the woman who was a sinner, and also wrote a sonnet upon her. The forgiving love of God which Jesus made real to her, was the power, when all others had failed, that won her away from her past and ushered her into a new life. In Rossetti's sonnet he makes her say:

"O, loose me, seest thou not my Bridegroom's face
That draws me to Him? For His feet, my kiss,

My hair, my tears He craves today:—
and oh!
What words can tell what other day
and place
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained
feet of His?
He needs me—calls me—loves me—let
me go!"

The warning description of the punishment that must follow a man's wrong doing, has little power to divert him from it. It is also true that the offer of forgiveness on easy terms has very little power to win men from selfishness to a better life. There is one efficient power and only one. It is the sight of suffering, freely borne for love's sake, which a man's wrong doing causes some one else to endure. Dante well understood this redemptive power when he said that "the rivers of the inferno are made of the tears we have caused others to shed." This is the practical value of the cross of Christ. It is this same cross which he asks all his friends to bear with him.

Every one who volunteers to help Christ bear His cross and win men

from wrong doing discovers that the free sacrifice of love is the only power strong enough to accomplish the result. Doctor Eliot declares that his experience at Harvard has taught him that the only way to save a bad young man is to bring to bear on him the influence of some one whom he loves, and make him face his evil deeds in terms of what they mean in sorrow to the loved one. The sufferings of Christ on the cross are the terms in sorrow of what men's sin meant to Him, and this is why the cross always has swayed their hearts.

This is a present-day and universal human experience. Margaret Deland in her book, "The Awakening of Helena Richie," illustrates it in a forceful and concrete form. Mrs. Richie regards the marriage tie as a convention which one may observe or not, claims the right to seek her happiness where and how she wishes, follows her own self-will, and leads a false life in old Chester, where her lover visits her as her brother. She has aroused the worshipful admiration of a bright but un-

trained boy. He worships her as his ideal of truth and purity and goodness. When he is told of her unworthiness, he denounces the statement as a lie, and goes to her for reassurance. He learns from her own lips that she is unworthy. When he sees his ideal of purity and goodness shattered,—the only ideal he had ever had,—he kills himself. It is this tragedy in the lives of others, due to her sin, that wins Mrs. Richie to a better life. Mrs. Deland describes her awakening:—

"Until now nothing had ever shaken that shelter. Nor had its dark walls been pierced by the disturbing light of any heavenly vision declaring that when personal happiness conflicts with any great human ideal, the right to claim such happiness is as nothing compared to the privilege of resigning it. She had not liked the secrecy which her shelter involved; no refined temperament likes secrecy. But the breaking of the law, in itself, had given her no particular concern; behind her excusing platitudes she had always been comfortable enough. Even that whirlwind of anger at Ben-

jamin Wright's contempt had only roused her to buttress her shelter with declarations that she was not harming anybody. But sitting there between William King and his wife, in the midst of decorously mournful Old Chester, she knew that she could never say that any more; not only because a foolish and ill-balanced youth had been unable to survive a shattered ideal, but because she began suddenly and with consternation to understand that the whole vast fabric of society rested on that same ideal. And she had been secretly undermining it! Her breath caught, strangling in her throat. In the crack of the pistol and the crash of the ruined family life, she heard for the first time the dreadful sound of the argument of her life to other lives; and at that sound the very foundation of those excuses of her right to happiness rocked and crumbled, and left her selfishness naked before her eyes."

That the guilty are saved by the suffering of the innocent is not only the truth for which the cross of Christ stands, but a common truth of human

experience. When the suffering is willingly borne for love's sake it becomes divine. I know a brilliant young man who ten years ago sold himself to do evil. He gambled and dissipated, neglected his obligations, appropriated to his own uses funds that belonged to others, and with his own hand wrecked bright prospects for a most useful career. Finally, he fled from home to escape the law. For ten years he lived in a "far country". His father sacrificed the slow accumulations of a long and honorable life of hard work to pay his son's debts and save the family's honor, which was dearer to him than life. He subjected himself to privations often to the point of distress, which for ten years added fresh burdens to his constant anxiety for his son's welfare. He waited and worked and prayed as only love knows how to pray. He often journied into the far country to plead in person, while the son resisted the appeals and permitted his best friend still to wait and suffer. After ten years the father's heroic self-sacrifice won the victory over sin, and brought

the son, a new man, back to his home and to a life of honor.

Three months after the son's return, the father lay dying. The hardship had broken his health. I was present at his bedside and what I then saw is the inspiration of what I now write about the cross of Christ. The son, a broken-hearted man, asked his father to forgive him for all the cruel injury he had done him and the suffering he had caused him. The father, with a look of compassion such as I have never seen, reached out his feeble hand and laid it on his son's head with a gentle pressure never more to be unfelt while life lasts. He said, "My boy, you need not ask my forgiveness; you never did any wrong to me; you have been the joy of my heart since you were born." The fire of the father's love had burned up even the memory of the tragedy he had suffered. But the tragedy itself was not destroyed. The father's statement made it to be only the more keenly felt by the son. The wonder of his father's self-sacrificing love was the son's veriest torment, but it was his salvation

too. The cross of Christ thus interprets God in terms of the highest of all human experiences which we know. "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved."

VII.

The Joy of the Cross.

VERY true, the self-sacrificing love of the father saved the son, but what of the father? What of the innocent, who bear the burdens of the guilty? Is this not a cruel injustice? If the father himself could reply to this question, he would make this all-sufficient answer. He would say,—"You are using the wrong word for it. I do not call it injustice. I call it heroism. It all depends on your point of view. Whenever you hear a burden for love's sake, the injustice of it is turned into a joy. The innocent must necessarily suffer for the guilty. It is an organic law of life, because all men and women constitute one family.

But all suffering may be made a joy through the free choice of love." I know that the father found this statement true, for during his last hour I noticed that there was light in his eye and a joy in his heart not born of this world. I know, as a matter of fact, that his ten-year sorrow was the deepest joy and most enriching experience of his life. He would doubtless illustrate what he meant by a story, for he was very fond of children and stories. He would tell the old Persian legend of the birds who at the first were created without wings. They had the beautiful plumage and the sweet song, but they could not fly in the clear air and sunshine among the trees and flowers. In answer to their request, the Maker of the birds made them wings, but made them separately, and commanded the birds to bear these loose wings as burdens on their backs. So the little birds walked on the ground and carried their wings on their backs. They soon began to notice that the wings became attached to ders under them with a will. Then them whenever they put their shoul-

they learned that what at first was a burden became their means of flight, and all the birds flew in joyous freedom ever afterwards. A very simple illustration of the very profound truth, that all weights become wings when willingly borne.

Gœthe said that Christianity is the deification of sorrow, which is partially true, but is only half of the truth at most. What Gœthe did not see is much more true, that Christianity is the deification of joy. More daringly still, Christianity asserts that joy is created by means of sorrow. The word "cross" has acquired two distinct meanings which have become common. It has become the symbol of what Christ's love did for men, an expression of what is most precious in the spiritual life. As such it is a joy and inspiration. It is the sign of the gentleness of God. This meaning is expressed in Christian song.

"Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand
The shadow of a mighty rock
Within a weary land."

The second meaning it has acquired is, that the cross is a test, a conflict, a somber thing, which one is asked to assume, but if assumed at all is done reluctantly. This also finds expression in Christian song:—

"Thou say'st, 'Take up thy cross,
O man, and follow me;
The night is black, the feet are slake
Yet we would follow Thee."

There is a third meaning which Christianity has put into the word, but which is understood as yet only by the few, but destined in the future to be one of its chief meanings, as Christianity becomes better understood and more generally practiced.—It is this: every cross willingly borne is instantly transformed into a joy, and every transformed sorrow is a deeper source of joy than any sorrowless joy. A cross may either be a self-denial, or a self-sacrifice. These ought never to be used as synonymous terms. If love is absent it is self-denial. If love is present, it is self-sacrifice. A mother's labor for her child may look to an outsider like self-denial. To the mother

it is something very different. Her love has transformed it into self-sacrifice, which is always a joy. Devotion in love to another or to a cause or to a country is very far from being a painful self-denial.

The word cross will one day come to stand for the wedding of sorrow and joy. They are not enemies but friends. Christianity did not create the sorrow of life. Its distinct function is to create the joy of life. Jesus is the great joy-bringer, and no body of literature in the world is so pervaded by the spirit of joy as is the New Testament. It even shows how the sorrows of life may be transmuted into joy. The agent it uses for doing so is love. The sufficient evidence of its success is the existence of happy men and women. And who are the happy men and women of the world? They are and always have been the men and women who are bearing crosses for love's sake. Gœthe correctly saw that Christianity made much of suffering. But the great German had never entered the New Testament sanctuary of sorrow enough

to understand that Christianity made much of sorrow only because sorrow is a means of joy. It was for the joy set before Him, Jesus said, that he endured the cross. Gœthe did not see what Mrs. Browning saw and expressed in her poem, "Musical Instruments", that it is out of pain that the sweetest songs have always come and can only come.

John Keat's well-known admiration for the nightingale is founded upon the fact that this bird makes a practice of artificially stimulating its centers of voice production by causing its breast to impinge upon a thorn. The use of pain as a means of adding depth and richness to one's music is a high achievement in bird or man. To impinge one's heart on a thorn is painful, very painful. And there are some sorrows, in view of which any easy and ready explanation seems like an insult to thinking men. It was a supremely difficult task which Jesus set himself to strew with flowers this world's open graves, to flood with sunshine this world's darkened rooms, to fill with music this world's wounded

hearts. A hard task indeed, but He performed it. He gave no easy explanations; He did something better; He helped men to accomplish the apparently impossible; He taught sad hearts to sing when wounded by thorns. He taught men to sing not only in spite of pain, but because of it.

One of the finest expressions of the joy that comes through self-sacrificing love is to be found in Browning's poem, "Saul", David comes to charm away with music the evil spirit which the Bible says choked the king. He untwists from his harp the lilies that were twined around the strings to keep them cool. He sings many songs to show the king what sane joyous living ought to be in God's fair world. He plays the pastoral tunes known to the sheep and to the animals, which Saint Francis used to call his brothers and sisters. He plays the tune of the reapers to remind the lonely king of the good friendship of the toilers. He sings the funeral march, the marriage chant, and the wild joys of living. He sings the memories of childhood, the gray hairs of father and the thin

hands of mother. At this the sullen king becomes aroused; his mad glare is gone. He puts out his hand and tenderly touches the brow of the beautiful young harpist. In that moment David is seized with a passion of love for the saddened soul of the unhappy king, and he thus expresses the discovery he then made:

"Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—knowing which,
I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!
Would I suffer for him that I love? So would'st thou—so wilt thou!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.
'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead; I seek and I find it. O Saul, It shall be
A face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

In that hour David saw the wonder of love, the vicarious love of one man for another. And through this human love, he saw what God's love is like. He prophesied the coming of Immortal Love in Christ because he himself had felt the thrill of vicarious love for Saul. When Saul leaned over the Shepherd boy and pushed back his hair and looked into his eyes, as if searching for help, David said, "And Oh, all my heart how it loved him!"

The singer left the tent to go home through the night, but he says he did not go alone. Clouds of witnesses were about him; angels came to listen to his prophesy of the coming of Love; earth seemed to be awakened, and the stars in their courses seemed to beat with emotion; an unseen Hand seemed to be laid upon his agitated emotion, and "quenched it into quiet," filling his heart with unspeakable joy and peace.

"And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—'E'en so, it is so!"

The poet means to say that all life and nature became new and spoke a new language to David because his own heart had become new. His own heart became new because it discovered the wonder of love that was willing to suffer. It was self-sacrificing love that threw open the gates of a new life to him.

The same discovery is just as open to every other man as it was to the shepherd boy, David. Any man may understand the meaning of the cross of Christ; any man may discover the profound nature and wonder of love; any man may experience the richest joy of life if he will bear willingly his share of the cross of Christ for love's sake, and to any individual cross that life lays upon his heart, will say in the great words of George Matheson:

"O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be."

Date Due

Mr 12 '40

Mr 24 '42

F 21 '47

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01008 3816